

D&D Fiction

Oroon Rising, Part 2

by Ed Greenwood



Chapter 2: To Die In Staelghast

“We go on, of course—what else?” Wide, battered and red-faced, Damryn looked more like an angry barn door than ever as he turned to look back at the rest of the Proud Slayers, the gray render’s gore dripping from his dented and torn armor in a dozen places. His broadsword had lost its tip and sported an uneven row of fang-like notches down its fore-edge, but was streaming render blood like a wide-open winecask spigot.

“Damur,” the other warrior gasped, staggering upright with effort, one arm dangling broken and useless, “we’re in no fit state to go on. Best we’d—”

The floor heaved suddenly under their feet. Then the air glowed around them, sparks appearing out of nowhere to gather like swarming bees on shields and swordpoints and armor.

Jallana spat a curse as she turned to look back at the distant archway they’d come through—in time to see a burst of light from beyond it, that could only be some sort of spellblast. She cursed again, more loudly, as the heavy, ear-numbing roars of several larger blasts boomed and rolled somewhere beyond that little explosion—and the archway collapsed and fell, stones tumbling with slow, majestic ease, to obliterate the way they’d come.

“I believe,” Ransur drawled, hefting one of his ever-present daggers, “our choice has been made for us.”

Ransur’s hair stood on end as the air around them tightened with an ominous crackle—and the air between the Proud Slayers split apart in a blinding white roar that flung them helplessly away, tumbling and skidding along the flagstone floor amid a stinging hail of stone shards.

When Jallana found her feet, head ringing and hair swirling free—her war-helm tumbling away down her shoulders in many pieces—she saw that Damur and Thornan would butcher no more gray renders, and Holy Halorn would never intone disapproving prayers again. Unless headless priests could somehow chant to the gods.

However, Ransur was melting back out of the sheltering lee of a pillar, as tall and mockingly handsome as ever, Lockilgar wore his usual lopsided grin, and Tarlastra was calmly sucking on her pipe to get it flaring again.



“Ha! Nothing can fell us—nothing!” Lockilgar was as cheerfully boastful as ever, thumping his chest as if it was as large and rolling-musclcd as Damur’s had been, and not the slender front of a rather small halfling. The bright scarlet and skyblue revel-shirt that served him as armor might have been torn and stone-smudged, but the Hero of All Halflings wore it as if it were dazzling-bright plate armor adorned with dozens of dragonslaying chevrons. “We’ll prevail, come what may! The gods themselves can’t—”

“Hoy!” Tarlastra snapped, slamming a hand into Lockilgar’s ribs to rob him of breath, dignity, balance, and his next words all at once. “Tempt no more dooms than we’ve earned already!” Then she turned to glare at Jallana almost angrily. “Still have yer wits, Prettyblade? There’s nothing left of yer helm!”

Jallana’s head was pounding, but her reluctant fingers had found no oozing blood nor soft places, and she said so as she watched the halfling writhe atop the bloody heap that had been Thornan, groaning and twisting his way back to being able to breathe.

Ransur was calmly looting the pouches, boots, and sheaths of their dead swordbrothers. Jallana gave him the same disgusted look Tarlastra had already favored him with, and turned to the she-dwarf. “Back to the Endless Stair?”

The glow of Tarlastra’s rekindled pipe lit her craggy face from below, making it look like a crude stone portrait. “Where else? We’re dead if we try to go on. The Great Idol’s been there longer than either of us has been alive, an’ it’ll go right on sitting there, patient enough. Finished playin’ the fool, halfling?”

Still wincing, Lockilgar gave her a growl. “One day, Lady of the Axe, you’ll try my generous spirit too far, and I’ll—”

“Assault my knee. I know. I tremble. Until then, can we save the heroics for when they might do us all some good? There’s just the four of us, now, and—”

Lockilgar interrupted her with a sudden, astonished “Urkkh!” as he spat forth a torrent of blood. Wearing astonishment above his ever-present smile, the halfling followed it face-first to the flagstones, leaving Jallana and Tarlastra staring at the gleaming dagger in the back of his neck.

And Ransur’s faint smile, beyond it.

“I find chest-thumping halfling heroes so tiresome,” the thief remarked, striding forward with liquid grace to retrieve his fang. He kept his eyes on Jallana and Tarlastra, and held another dagger, its keen edge yellow-green with some unknown poison or other, poised for throwing. “So noisy.”

The weary warrior and the dwarf mage stared at him.

“Find a similar excuse to slay me, Slytongue,” Tarlastra growled, “and you’ll also find an unpleasant surprise. I’d thought we Proud Slayers were a loyal-to-each-other team, standing together against the beasts and traps of this place. Obviously I’ve been laboring under a misapprehension.”



“Obviously,” the thief murmured, smiling his easy half-smile. He was hefting daggers now in both hands, one blade dark and wet with Lockilgar’s blood.

The dwarf gave him a glare, moved her pipe to one corner of her clenched teeth, wiped her stubby-fingered hands down her already-besmirched gown, and started to cast a spell.

Ransur gave her a glare and a lightning-swift hurled knife, flashing end over end at the mage—who halted her chanting to hold up her hand, scarred palm out against him.

Just before it reached Tarlastra, the whirling steel struck something unseen in midair—and fell to the floor, shattering into tiny, twinkling shards.

Smiling tightly, she pointed with her other hand at Ransur—and metal things fled from him, tumbling and whirling away from her pointing finger as if driven by a gale.

She and Jallana both expected the thief to be carrying an arsenal of sinister blades of various sorts, but they were astonished to see more than a score of pointed and edged items—from calf-length whipstings to fingernail-sized hookslices—depart Ransur, followed by more than a dozen belt-buckles that left him standing half-naked among a tangle of baldrics and hitherto-hidden underbelts.

Jallana’s snort of mirth earned her a murderous glare from the thief, who snatched his way free of his ankle-tangling breeches in a whirlwind of deft pluckings and charged at her, a waxed strangling-cord suddenly in his hands.

He was still one running stride shy of her throat—and losing his fingers to her rising blade—when a particular flagstone he’d stepped on dipped, clicked, and brought the ceiling thundering down on them all.

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